



Above: Patrice is an aspiring novelist and is working on a crime novel based on her experiences in the force.

Below right: Patrice was awarded the Purple Heart in 2001.

her best and live with integrity.” As a seven-year-old, she often reflected on those words as she drove her shiny, white pedal car around the neighborhood. Emblazoned with the words “Highway Patrol,” this vehicle became Patrice’s gateway for a lifetime love of police work and adventure.

“I’ve always had a natural instinct to fly,” Patrice says.

Patrice’s Uncle Everett, a pilot, also piqued her interest in flying with captivating tales.

On breaks from the University of Missouri, Patrice worked part-time at a St. Louis beer can factory and managed to save enough money to enroll in flight lessons in 1976. She received her Fixed Wing Certificate in 1978.

In 1979, Patrice earned a Behavioral Sciences Life Teaching Certificate but decided against teaching. She instead took a position as a personnel assistant. Still restless, she applied for a position with the St. Louis County Police.

Prior to acceptance into the St. Louis Police Academy in November 1980, Patrice endured a rigorous five months of written tests, oral interviews, polygraphs, and background checks. After four months of training, she graduated with the highest ranking ever earned by a woman at that time. In 1981, she received the Chief’s Letter of Commendation Award for being the top recruit in her class. Patrice would spend close to four years on patrol in North County, the same area she ex-

plored as a child in her pedal car.

In 1984, thoughts of flying resurfaced. A Flight Operations position in the helicopter unit became available and combined her love of law enforcement and aviation. A former helicopter pilot with the department advised: “Don’t bother applying. They’ll never take a woman in the unit.”

Ignoring his advice, Patrice applied. Out of eighty applicants, she was the only woman and the only individual with aviation background. After she was accepted, Patrice completed six months of observer training and flight instruction with a Vietnam veteran helicopter pilot. In December 1984, Patrice became the first female police officer in the United States to become a helicopter pilot with a law enforcement agency.

Five years later, Flight Operations and Tactical Operations in St. Louis County merged to become SWAT. Patrice became a member of SWAT while keeping her helicopter pilot position. In recognition of her expert marksmanship, she was selected as the unit’s sole female sniper and attended FBI-sponsored sniper skills and training schools.

In 2001 when she rushed to the scene of a car engulfed in flames, her squad car hit a patch of black ice and spiraled backward down an embankment. The fire truck that also rushed to the scene spun 360 degrees and crashed. Patrice suffered a broken neck and spinal damage that would force her to rest for eight months, but she refused medical attention at the scene and aided others. Patrice was awarded the Purple Heart in 2001 for sustaining injuries in the line of duty.

“I’ve felt the need to be prepared for every situ-

ation,” she says. “In the back of my mind I’ve held onto two thoughts: Be safe and help anyone along the way.”

Now retired from the force, Patrice enjoys giving back as a Safe Connections board member. The agency provides counseling and support for women victimized by domestic violence and sexual assault. She’s also a member of the Ninety-Nines, the women’s pilot association founded by Amelia Earhart, and she has also worked with Discovering Options, a program that pairs mentors with at-risk children. Patrice was matched with a young boy while she was on the police force. Whenever possible, they’d visit the helicopter hanger, and he’d ask Patrice about her career. Patrice urged the boy to stay in school and keep his grades up, telling him the sky was the limit. After a couple years of mentoring, the boy told Patrice he wanted to become a police officer. At that moment, she says she felt proud to have influenced the boy’s life.

Patrice is penning her first fiction crime novel based on her experiences. Two dogs, four cats, and a talkative Umbrella Cockatoo share a home with her and her companion, Brenda Fraser.

In her downtime, Patrice explores the open road on her motorcycle.

She chuckles. “It’s the closest thing to flying.”

